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Who Knows Where the Time Goes?---or, What To Do With a Diminished Thing?

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Teaching and Learning Center, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC

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Who Knows Where the Time Goes?—or, What To Do With a Diminished Thing?

I just flipped all my calendars to November. How in the world did that happen? It seems like only yesterday I was passing out syllabi and thinking about the long semester that lay ahead. Once November comes, the end looms. Who knows where the time goes?

That is the title of a song by the late great singer Sandy Denny, who recorded her song "Who Knows Where the Time Goes?" with both the Strawbs and Fairport Convention in the late 60s. Judy Collins made it the B-side of "Both Sides Now," as well as the title of a 1968 album. "Across the evening sky, all the birds are leaving," the lyrics say. A beautiful, melancholy autumn song. Here is a link to a rare acoustic version from Fairport Convention on the BBC in 1968, for your listening pleasure while you read:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e3wbVcGpUdw>

Who knows where the time goes? When November rushes at me like this, I react with a bit of panic. After this week, we have two full weeks of classes (minus one day for the election), then Thanksgiving week, which is not even a half week, then one more full week. And that's pretty much it for the semester. Who knows where the time goes?

But then another part of me tells me just to calm down. "Time is the stream I go a-fishing in," Thoreau tells me. Time is all in my head.

Here's a thought: remember when we flipped the calendar from August to September? Remember the feeling of leisure we had about time? In essence, that is the time we have left. All that you accomplished in the easy days of September can be accomplished in the supposedly harried days of November, when all the birds are leaving. One of my favorite Robert

Frost poems is his 1916 sonnet "The Oven Bird." Here is his poem:

There is a singer everyone has heard,
Loud, a mid-summer and a mid-wood bird,
Who makes the solid tree trunks sound again.
He says that leaves are old and that for flowers
Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten.
He says the early petal-fall is past
When pear and cherry bloom went down in showers
On sunny days a moment overcast;
And comes that other fall we name the fall.
He says the highway dust is over all.
The bird would cease and be as other birds
But that he knows in singing not to sing.
The question that he frames in all but words
Is what to make of a diminished thing.

The oven bird is not the most attractive bird, but since it hides itself in the woods, only those who

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work hard to seek it out will see it. But you can hear its song—and long after other birds have stopped singing, after mating season is over. Frost translates the oven bird's song as telling us that "leaves are old," and even giving us a mathematical ratio, "that for flowers," spring has it ten to one over mid-summer. And in Frost's poem, as in Sandy Denny's song, "comes that other fall we name the fall." But unlike most of the other birds, the oven bird continues to sing. And his final message is a question: "what to make of a diminished thing."

Today, the first day of November, was a diminished thing if I have ever encountered one. The cold that has been raging around campus caught me the other day, and I would much rather have stayed in bed this morning than teach my 9:30 class. The students had taken a test Tuesday, so I knew the vast majority of them would not have completed today's reading. And I felt so bad last night that I forgot to look for the materials I needed for class today. What to make of a diminished thing? But

instead of calling in sick, I dragged myself out of bed this morning and searched YouTube for some videos on Joseph Campbell and the hero journey. Five or students were absent when class began, and although two or three dragged themselves in late, class was surely a diminished thing. We sat in the dark and watched three short videos—surely a perilous feat, given our physical states.

But by the end of the class, after a lively discussion, the entire point of our semester became clear: not only is Frodo on a hero journey in *The Lord of the Rings*, but the students are too. They thought they were merely *reading* about a hero-in-waiting, living in his Mundane World, waiting for The Call to Adventure, meeting The Wise Mentor and Friends and Foes, embarking on The Road of Trials, fulfilling The Quest, and Coming Home; but they were not merely reading. As Joseph Campbell says, the ego must look into a mirror to see itself, and that mirror is myth. We left class after those 75 minutes in awe of the power of story, of myth, to reveal ourselves to us.

Who knows where the time goes, we are tempted to ask in despair. But there is still much that we can make of this diminished thing.

One more point about the oven bird, a point I am sure Frost knew. Birders have "handles" for bird song, words that they use to describe the notes the birds are singing. The handle for the song of the oven bird is "teacher teacher!" The oven bird is us, the teacher, continuing to sing, to teach, after all the other birds have moved on to their other life business.



XXITE 2.0 ----- The Virtual Gathering Place for WU (The Reboot!)

Jo Koster and I invite you to join XXITE (Twenty-first Century Teaching Excellence)—or if you have already joined, to check it out again as it grows and develops. Maybe you have not been there in a long time—if not, you will see many changes in look and content. For example, XXITE now has groups dedicated to HMXP and CRTW, with

those of us who teach those courses sharing ideas and materials. Talk to Jo about setting up your own interest group. Jo is particularly interested in recruiting a few people to blog regularly about their teaching.

Jo set up this interactive site to give Winthrop faculty a virtual gathering space to share ideas about teaching and

technology. You'll find blogs and discussion forums on various topics—and we urge you to add your own ideas. Visit again at <http://wuxxite.ning.com/> Or email Jo Koster for an invitation to join: kosterj@winthrop.edu The TLC website also has links to navigate your way there or to join: <http://www2.winthrop.edu/tlc/>

An ongoing publication of Winthrop University's Teaching and Learning Center. Past issues are now archived on our webpage: <http://www2.winthrop.edu/tlc/mainresources.html>

A New Service From the TLC: Teaching Consultation

The Teaching and Learning Center is offering a new service: teaching consultation. At the instructor's request, I (or another agreed-upon person) will visit your class to observe and consult with you afterwards about your successes and challenges. This consultation has nothing to do with the tenure and

promotion process, and no reports will be made to department chairs or deans (unless you so request). The invitation to the consultant can only come from the instructor, not from a dean or chair or any other person. All conversations will be private and confidential. If you don't want me to visit your class and observe your teaching, we could

just meet and talk about your teaching. If I am not available to visit your class because of my schedule, I will find a qualified person to do the consulting. So please let me know if you would like to invite me into your class or for a consultation. Call or email me at (803) 323-3679 or birdj@winthrop.edu.

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Session
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Thought for The Week

"I am not one of those who in expressing opinions confine themselves to facts. I don't know anything that mars good literature so completely as too much truth."

--Mark Twain